

CORRESPONDENCE

ON THE SUBJECT OF

ALTAR CARDS,

BETWEEN

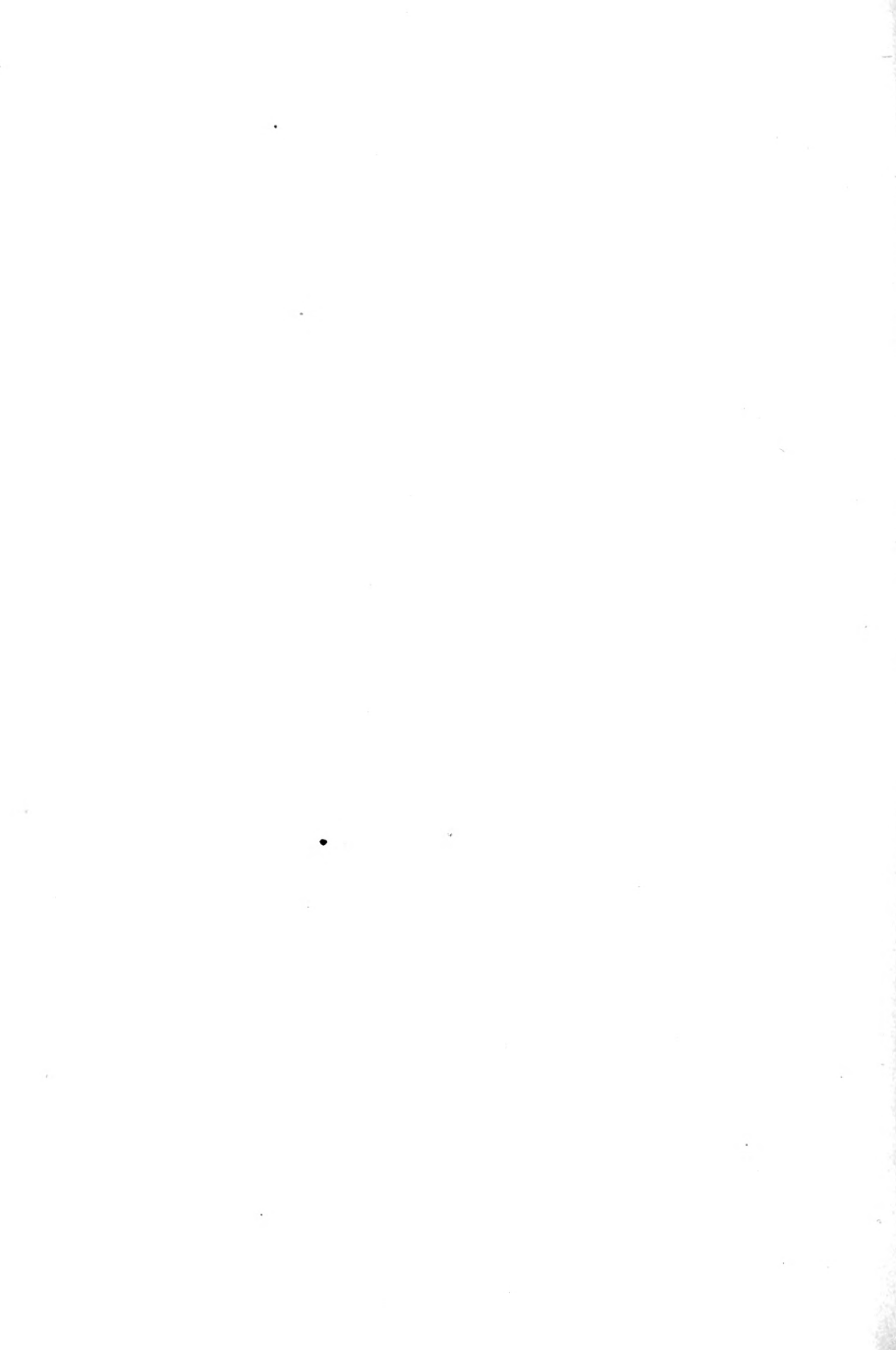
HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY,

AND THE

REV. R. J. WILSON,

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD.

April 24, 1874.

MY LORD ARCHBISHOP,

As the compiler of perhaps one of the fullest of the Altar Cards, on the use of which your Grace commented at some length and with the greatest severity on Monday last in the House of Lords, I beg most respectfully to represent to you the very great misconception into which you have been led in this matter by a careless informant.

Your Grace has not yourself seen the Altar Card which you so seriously censure. Had you done so, you would have found in a moment that those who use them are not open to the grievous charges in respect of dishonesty, cowardice, the desecration of Holy Communion, which, amidst cheers, you brought against them in the House of Lords.

Your condemnation of us rests on two main grounds.

1. That we use Altar Cards which contain invocation of Saints.

2. That using these invocations we are afraid to use them aloud, but only say them in a low voice through cowardice.

1. In answer to the first point, I beg with great confidence to affirm that no known Altar Card contains a single invocation of a single Saint from beginning to end.

I feel sure that your Grace will be glad to learn that you have been misinformed, and that your serious accusations against some English Clergy rest on no real foundation.

Your Grace's informant, whose veracity is no doubt unimpeachable, must either not have seen the Cards, and have been reporting to your Grace at

second hand, or having seen them must have taken no care to find out what they contained. The merest tiro in Theology, on looking in the most cursory manner at the Cards, would have seen that there was not a word of invocation of Saints contained therein. Your Grace's informant will no doubt regret that in either case his (may I say it?) culpable carelessness has betrayed the Primate of all England into making very serious and utterly baseless charges against English Clergy.

The only two passages which could have formed the material for so strange a blunder on your informant's part, are the following :

(a) In a prayer in which we pray for your Grace our Primate, our Bishop, and others, we say, "Joining in communion with, and reverencing the memory of Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, Mother of our God, and Lord Jesus Christ, Thy blessed Apostles, Martyrs" (then follow the names of Saints in one Card, which are omitted in the others), and the prayer continues, being addressed throughout to the first Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Here your Grace will see there is not a shadow of an invocation of Saints, but only a prayer to Almighty God, containing a fuller statement of the same practice embodied in the Prayer for the Church Militant, in the words, "and we also bless Thy Holy Name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear."

(b) In a prayer to God, inserted in *one* of the Cards, beginning, "Deliver us, O Lord, we beseech Thee," occur the words, "and at the intercession of the Blessed Mary, Ever Virgin Mother of God, with that of Thy Blessed Apostles, Peter, and Paul, and of Andrew, and all Saints, favourably grant peace in our time, that by the help of Thy mercy we may be kept from sin, &c."

Your Grace will see that neither can these words be by any ingenuity interpreted into an invocation

of Saints. This, like every other prayer on the Card, is a direct address to Almighty God.

Anyone who would have the boldness to condemn these prayers must condemn the following propositions :

(i.) That the Saints pray for those on earth. (ii.) That it is lawful to pray to God that we may have the advantage of such prayers.

I will venture to say that few orthodox Christians (whether or no they use such prayer), when they have once realized the article of Faith—the Communion of Saints, would be bold enough to controvert either the one statement or the other.

It would be superfluous in me to remind you of the language of Archbishop Bramhall, and a still greater authority, Bishop Pearson, and other English Divines, on this subject. The question whether any invocation of Saints is permissible in the English Church is wholly irrelevant to the matter I venture to bring before your Grace. I only submit that these prayers are in no way contrariant to the teaching of the Church of England, and that by no possibility can they be fairly distorted into invocation of Saints.

2. I need say very little on the second ground of your Grace's censure.

We say these prayers in an undertone, or inaudibly, not as your Grace seems to suppose through cowardice, but because we think that the private prayers even of the celebrating Priest should be said privately, and that it would be disturbing to the congregation, were he to say his private prayers in a loud voice. This is enough to answer to your Grace's charge of cowardice.

I may be allowed a few words on minor charges.

As to the reason for having special private prayers thus printed, it seemed to some of us that it was more edifying that a large number of Clergy when celebrating Holy Communion should use the same private prayers rather than different ones ; and it

seemed no argument against the use of those selected, (unless indeed their doctrine were erroneous, as I submit it plainly is not,) that they are similarly used by thousands of Clergy who belong to the Roman Communion. Indeed, I confess it has always appeared to me a very great gain for us, that however separated in other matters, we could, at what your Grace most appropriately calls "the holiest moment of the service," use the same prayers as the thousands of Clergy of another Communion and of other countries. It seemed an effort towards, at any rate, invisible union, which we trust our One Lord, the lover of unity, may bless.

The reason why these prayers are printed on a single sheet instead of being in the form of a book, is because they are more conveniently read at such a time in this form.

The reason why only one prayer comes from the English Ritual, (a circumstance which seemed to displease your Grace,) was this, that in a paper or book containing professedly private prayers it seemed useless to repeat the prayers already contained in the Prayer Book, which the Priest has close by him. But the Prayer of Consecration is printed, because it can be more conveniently seen when placed opposite the Celebrant than when placed at his side.

I trust that I may have in all points satisfied your Grace that so far as Altar Cards are concerned we are quite blameless. Your Grace, with the weight of your esteemed character and the authority of your exalted office, has publicly in the House of Lords charged those of us who use Altar Cards with invocation of Saints at Holy Communion, and with cowardice for not invoking them audibly. You have charged us publicly with desecration of Holy Communion. I have shewn that these grave charges rest on erroneous information, or misconception, and are in fact absolutely without any foundation.

May I hope, my Lord Archbishop, that with your

well known candour you will withdraw your censures and retract your accusations as soon as possible, with the same publicity with which you made them? For indeed your Grace has (most unwittingly, no doubt), on absolutely no grounds, inflicted a cruel wrong on us, and indirectly on the Church of which we are devoted members.

Should your Grace be good enough to send me a reply to this letter, I shall reserve to myself the privilege of publishing the correspondence.

I am, my Lord Archbishop,

Your Grace's most humble and obedient Servant,

ROBERT J. WILSON, M.A.,

Fellow and Tutor of Merton College, Oxford.

LAMBETH PALACE,

April 25, 1874.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

I am desired by the Archbishop of Canterbury to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 24th inst. on the subject of statements in his speech in introducing the "Public Worship Regulation Bill" in the House of Lords on Monday last.

His Grace does not think that any good purpose would be subserved by entering into a correspondence on the questions which you raise, as there will be sufficient opportunity for any explanations, if necessary, during the progress of the Bill in the House of Lords.

Believe me to be,

Yours faithfully,

H. MAXWELL SPOONER,

Chaplain.

The Rev. R. J. WILSON, M.A., &c., &c.

MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD.

April 28th, 1874.

MY LORD ARCHBISHOP,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of a letter from your Grace's Chaplain of the 25th inst.

It is not for me to presume to question the course that your Grace thinks it right to pursue in respect of the grave censures you passed in the House of Lords on those Clergy who use Altar Cards.

Yet as your Grace charged a number of Clergy publicly with dishonesty, cowardice, and desecration of Holy Communion on the express ground of the Altar Cards they use containing Invocation of Saints, and as, I think, I have shewn that the Altar Cards do not contain any Invocation of Saints, I may perhaps be allowed to express a regret that your Grace does not see fit at once to withdraw the grave censures you passed on us, under an evident misconception of the facts.

Still, unless your Grace thinks proper to reconsider the matter, we must wait till what I am certain will be a very early occasion, on which you will give us that substantial reparation that we have a right to claim at your hands, and when you will do your utmost to remove those reflections on our character which your Grace's language was eminently calculated to convey.

The propriety or impropriety of having private prayers placed for the convenience of the Priest in one form or another on the Altar, is I venture to say, a most insignificant question. I am not aware of any regulation, Parliamentary or otherwise, prescribing the form or amount of printed material to be placed on the Holy Table.

I beg to repeat that I am not concerning myself now with the important question of whether Invoca-

tion of Saints is permissible within the broad limits of the English Communion.

I have only dealt with your Grace's charge that on certain particular grounds we are guilty of dishonesty, cowardice, desecration of Holy Communion. I contend that we are absolutely blameless in this matter: and the use of such private prayers as are contained in the cards is justified by the formularies, authorities, and principles of the English Church.

I shall do my best in any way I can to remove from the minds of their Lordships the Bishops, and of others who may have read your speech, the wrong impressions in this matter that your Grace's statement must have conveyed. And may I not confidently reckon on your Grace's assistance? Awaiting the withdrawal of the censures and charges into which your Grace's erroneous information has led you,

I am, my Lord Archbishop,

Your Grace's very obedient and humble Servant,

ROBERT J. WILSON.

